



Canal Road - Scenic Byway

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## WELCOME TO CANAL ROAD Introducing the Scenic Byway

Roadside oak, sycamore, elm, and black locust trees canopy the western miles of the roadway; except for an old, three-story stone house, few man-made structures intrude into the corridor of green. In its eastern portion, beneath the spires of the university on the hill, streetscapes of stylish townhouses, restaurants, and storefronts are reminiscent of 250 years of commercial vitality. And running along the entire route is a remarkably intact, engineered waterway from the heyday of the Canal Era in the 19th century. This is the Canal Road Scenic Byway, a gateway to history, nature, and recreation in Washington, DC.

The Canal Road Scenic Byway traces a route that was historically part of the “Potomac Route to the West.” Its 4.4 mile length follows the Potomac River and a section of the former Chesapeake & Ohio Canal from the Georgetown district of Washington, DC to the Maryland State line. Originally established by Native Americans before the arrival of the first Euro-American settlers, the route was a prominent public road known as the Georgetown and Leesburg Turnpike before the District of Columbia was established. Today, the route is made up of several roads - the Clara Barton Parkway, Canal Road, and M Street. The corridor includes not only these busy roadways, but also the adjoining area of the C&O National Historic Park, the Potomac River waterfront, and the high bluffs known as the Palisades.

The C&O Canal went out of business in 1924; in the 1950s, the Canal survived a proposal to become an automobile parkway. The Canal and adjoining lands now endure as a significant historic, natural, and recreational resource. Today, the horses and mules that once pulled canal barges along the waterway have been replaced by hikers, runners, bikers, birdwatchers, and people out for a scenic stroll. Visitors to the byway can hike a variety of trails,

take a ride in a canal boat or canoe along the Canal, bike along the tow path, and enjoy a natural area so close to a large city.

The Canal Road Byway is an urban scenic byway with much to offer, especially to those who take the time and make the effort. It is also - despite the roadside vegetation and few visible man-made structures - a major, high-volume commuter route in and out of Washington, DC. Vehicle safety along Canal Road is a major issue, and visitor needs and expectations must be balanced with local road use. Being an urban roadway also has its advantages: you can spend the day biking or walking along the Canal, and spend the evening enjoying a fine dinner in Georgetown! The Canal Road Scenic Byway has evolved over a long and colorful history. It is a byway with a rich and multi-faceted “personality.” Come, get to know it. Experience Washington’s Gateway Road.



### TOC

#### Overview of this Report

- Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the Canal Road Scenic Byway, a description of the byway designation, byway programs, and Corridor Management Plans, and sets forth a vision and objectives for this plan.
- Chapter 2 examines the existing setting of the corridor by describing the byway segments, reviewing the physical condition and safety of the roadway, and establishing the planning framework within which byway activities will take place.
- Chapter 3 describes the intrinsic qualities that characterize the Canal Road byway. The corridor is so rich in many types of resources that these inventories provide a summary of the corridor’s highlights. Chapter 3 also considers some of the concerns and detractors from these intrinsic qualities.
- Chapter 4 is a set of plans for: maintaining and enhancing intrinsic qualities; visitors’ experience; roadway modification, streetscape treatment, and multi-modal strategy; marketing and promotion; and commerce and facilities.
- Chapter 5 addresses implementation, funding, public participation, and a general schedule for accomplishing the goals of this plan.





Fig. 1-2

SCENIC BYWAYS ACROSS AMERICA

# Welcome to Canal Road About Scenic Byways

## What is a Scenic Byway?

The term “scenic byway” generally refers to a road that is set in a landscape of high aesthetic, historical or cultural value. Scenic byways place an emphasis on scenery, recreational attractions, cultural and historic features, and wildlife. Byways typically involve such amenities as scenic overlooks, recreational areas, and interpretive systems. A single definition does not exist because many agencies, state, federal, local and private, are involved in the scenic byways program

Scenic byways may be designated at the local, state, or national level. There are about 52,000 miles of scenic byways in the United States.

## District of Columbia Scenic Byways Program

Canal Road is a designated scenic byway within the District of Columbia. The DC Scenic Byways Program was developed and is administered by the District Department of Transportation. Consisting of the Canal Road Byway and three other designated byways, it is the only entirely urban scenic byway program in the Nation, where all the byways are located completely within an urban setting.

This urban setting creates a distinctly urban set of challenges and opportunities for scenic byway planning. It means that the roadway corridor can be an exceedingly busy place, both day and night, and that visitors to the byway share the road with local traffic and commuters. It means that the predominant views along the byway are not of the natural environment but of the built environment, and that many of the resources of the byway are man-made. Because the byways are located in Washington, DC, it also means that there are a multitude of government agencies, special interest groups, neighborhood associations, and business

districts that all share an active interest in the well-being of the byway.

In developing its Scenic Byways Program, the District Department of Transportation established an administrative, nomination, and review process, which is presented in the program “Guidelines and Procedures” (1998). The intent of the program is:

- To provide a means for the maintenance, protection, and enhancement of important community resources along designated roadways in the District;
- To interpret and promote those resources and related intrinsic qualities for the enjoyment and education of residents and visitors; and
- To establish community-based goals and strategies to manage the intrinsic qualities while enhancing the economic benefits derived from people traveling the byways.

## Connections to Other Byways

The Canal Road corridor can be combined with other byways to provide travelers with a continuous experience within the Nation’s Capital and surrounding regions. Beyond the District boundary, the Canal Road Byway continues as Maryland’s C&O Canal Route Scenic Byway, extending all the way to Cumberland, Maryland.

The Canal Road Scenic Byway connects to the Pennsylvania Avenue Scenic Byway at M Street in Georgetown, thus providing an unbroken byway experience from District boundary to District boundary. The Pennsylvania Avenue Byway is distinctive as “America’s Ceremonial Way” and the “Main Street of American Government,” offering many unique attractions, sights, and resources, as it traverses seven miles across a wide variety of Washington, DC, neighborhoods.

## Byway Speak

**Scenic Byway** - A public road having special scenic, natural, historic, cultural, archaeological, and/or recreational qualities that have been recognized as such through official declaration. The term refers not only to the road or highway itself but also to the corridor through which it passes.

**Corridor** - The road or highway right-of-way and the adjacent area that is visible from and extending along the highway. Corridor width may vary according to intrinsic qualities.

**Intrinsic Quality** - Any of the scenic, natural, historic, cultural, archaeological, and recreational features that are considered representative, unique, irreplaceable, or distinctly characteristic of the area along a byway.

**Corridor Management Plan** - A written document and maps that specify the actions, procedures, controls, operational practices, and administrative strategies to maintain the scenic, natural, historic, cultural, archaeological, and recreational qualities of the scenic byway.

**Stakeholders** - Residents, property owners, community associations, recreational groups, tour sponsors, tourism bureaus, historic societies, businesses, government agencies, and other individuals and organizations interested in, and working for, the success of the byway.

**Local Commitment** - Assurance provided by communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and agencies that they will undertake actions (such as zoning, development review, easements, and other protective measures) to preserve the scenic, natural, historic, cultural, archaeological, and recreational integrity of the scenic byway or All-American Road and the adjacent area as identified in the corridor management plan.